THE BALTIC STATES AND WEIMAR *OSTPOLITIK*

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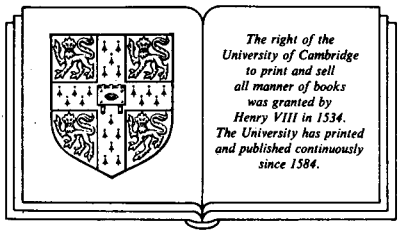

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PART I: THE POLITICS OF PEACEMAKING 1919–20

I

German–Russian perspectives

In looking backwards to the First World War and the centuries beyond, it is clear that, in the struggle between the European regimes over the Baltic Sea, the position of Germany and Russia overshadowed that of all other powers in the end. With regard to the German Empire after 1871, as to the policy of Prussia before that, the absence of serious Russo-German conflict over the Baltic region owed much to the favoured position formerly secured by the Baltic German aristocracy in what were then the Baltic provinces of Russia. Here, Estonia, Livonia and Courland must be distinguished from Lithuania, with its largely Polish nobility. The local power enjoyed by the great medieval German colonizers of the Baltic remained largely intact after the provinces became part of the Russian Empire in the eighteenth century. The four great Ritterschaften of Estonia, Livonia, Courland and the Islands of Oesel continued to rule loyally for successive Tsars, on behalf of, but increasingly at the expense of, the native Estonians and Latvians. Since the initial failure of the Teutonic Order to subjugate Lithuania closed the provinces to an influx of German farmers, the Baltic barons developed as a dominant caste on the land and in the towns. The long process of readjustment to which this ultimately condemned them was only too apparent by the early nineteenth century, since the land reforms which the German baronial caste felt compelled to introduce then were certain to benefit the Latvian and Estonian peasantry in the long run.[1] Demographic and social trends in general shifted influence and power towards the towns, particularly as the Baltic provinces became important centres of Russian industry in the later nineteenth century.[2] In turn this shift accelerated the growth of a native bourgeoisie

and proletariat, providing the basis for a range of parties and ideologies to assume embryonic form and contributing a political dimension to the earlier awakening of Latvian and Estonian cultural and linguistic nationalism.[3]

Any satisfaction of the demands of the native Baltic peoples for a greater share in the administration of the provinces had necessarily to be at the expense of the socially, economically and politically dominant Baltic Germans. In addition, the latter faced the centralizing measures of the Tsarist regime in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The steady erosion of the privileges once granted by Peter the Great to the German element in Livonia, Courland and Estonia provoked Carl Schirren's 'Livonian Answer' of the 1860s: 'If the spirit of Nystad means anything, it is to rule, not to Russify.' A distinctly beleagured mentality developed amongst the Germans in the provinces, particularly after the revolution in Russia in 1905, when ferocious attacks were made on the great baronial estates by the Latvians and Estonians. The revolution at least demonstrated that the Baltic Germans and the Tsarist regime retained a mutual interest in keeping Baltic nationalist movements in check, but the experience of 1905 also doomed to failure the efforts of men like Baron Eduoard von Dellinghausen to find a basis for timely reforms involving the native population in the administration of the region. Instead, Baltic Germans closed ranks. From 1905 the relatively new feeling of solidarity between the Baltic German aristocracy and the German urban bourgeoisie intensified. Their combined efforts after the revolution to protect the future of German schools and culture spanned for the first time all three provinces, through the setting up of larger associations (Deutsche Vereine). The defensive mentality also revealed itself in the schemes from 1907 onwards to arrange for the settlement of German farmers (chiefly from Wolhynien) in the Baltic provinces, a project associated above all with the names of Silvio Broederich and Karl Baron Manteuffel. Although the existence of different political currents within the Baltic German camp was an important pointer to post-war developments, prior to 1914 a shared resistance to fundamental change was dominant.[4]

The anomalous and privileged position of the Baltic German Russian subjects was not one which assured them of any great sympathy in the German Empire after 1871. In any case their own traditional values made them equally opposed to the centralized state tradition.[5] After 1905 an active conservative press campaign in the

Reich awakened some public interest in the plight of the Baltic Germans, but the Liberals showed no great concern for their brethren in the provinces, and the hostility of the Social Democrats was overt.[6] Bismarck's policy of avoiding conflict in the Baltic for the sake of the security of the new Germany remained largely intact until 1914. The attempts of prominent emigré Baltic Germans like Theodor Schiemann to involve the German government in his anti-Russian schemes met with scant success. Russia and Germany preserved a mutual tolerance over Baltic issues, although their paramount importance for these was underlined indirectly prior to the First World War by Britain's abandonment of an active naval strategy in the area.[7] It would be premature to conclude that the Baltic Germans had already firmly embarked on the 'road from Tsar to Kaiser' in 1905, but the onset of war in 1914 could hardly leave the Bismarckian policy of non-intervention intact.

War ultimately fostered a growing feeling of solidarity between Reich Germans and Baltic Germans. It finally broke the latter's traditional loyalty to the Tsarist government and provided the opportunity from 1917 for a coalition of powerful interests to be formed in the Reich and in the provinces. In Germany, conservative annexationists, economic interest groups and above all the German High Command (Oberste Heeresleitung = OHL) propounded the view that to secure the Baltic as a power-base would be to hold a standing threat against the feared might of Russia and to secure for Germany the vital sea-route to Finland and Sweden. Land for settlement and food would be provided on Germany's borders; the Reich's major pre-war commercial rival in the Baltic provinces, Great Britain, would be prevented from becoming the dominant influence in the strategically vital area of north-east Europe.[8] Voices were indeed raised early on inside Germany against the attachment of the Baltic provinces in any form to the German Empire. Yet those Baltic Germans, living in the Reich after 1905, who had set up the Baltische Vertrauensrat on 10 May 1915 under Otto von Veh were assured of a hearing when they submitted their memorandum to the German Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg: 'We have only one choice; to be annexed by Germany or massacred by Russia.'[9]

The former became more likely as the German armies rolled forward in 1915, overrunning Lithuania and Courland by the autumn of that year. After two years' stalemate along a line stretched between Riga, Dvinsk and Baranovitch, the German armed forces resumed

their advance after the revolution in Russia in March 1917 and the collapse of the Tsarist army. Riga was recaptured on 3 September 1917, and in February 1918 the occupation of Livonia and Estonia brought German troops to within one hundred miles of Petrograd. Compelled to make peace with the Germans in order to maintain the revolution in Russia, the Bolsheviks endured the loss of Courland and Lithuania at Brest–Litovsk in March 1918. Although Estonia and Livonia were initially to be 'policed' by German forces, pending the restoration of peace and order, they too were ultimately severed from Russia by agreements concluded between the German government and the Bolsheviks in Berlin on 27 August 1918.

It has, however, become increasingly difficult to maintain that the Treaty of Brest–Litovsk had anything like as broad a domestic consensus behind it in the Reich as Fritz Fischer's work maintained. Of course, the treaty pleased annexationists, the majority of Baltic Germans and the OHL.[10] The great influence wielded by the supreme army leaders after 1916, General Erich Ludendorff and Field Marshal von Hindenburg, was very much in evidence behind the day-to-day running of the military administration covering the Baltic provinces. In the hands of Alfred von Gossler, conservative Reichstag deputy, former Landrat of Prussia and hitherto military governor of occupied Courland, the new military administration in the Baltic (from which Lithuania was separated in the summer of 1918) showed itself determined to convert occupation into permanent German control.[11] Obsessed with strategic issues, the OHL determinedly continued milking the resources of the Baltic provinces. Elaborate settlement projects were planned, both to improve the food supplies of the German Empire and to provide a vital source of reserve manpower.[12] For the German military leaders the Treaty of Brest–Litovsk was but a step towards their goal of permanently weakening Russia by erecting a bulwark of border states. The seizure of power by the Bolsheviks in Russia simply added an ideological dimension to the *Ostpolitik* of the OHL. The menace of Bolshevism also provided a convenient rationale for detaching the Baltic countries permanently from Russia.[13] The proposed barrier of border states, protecting as well as nourishing the Reich, was increasingly regarded by the German military in 1918 as a launching pad for a further decisive action against Lenin and his followers which would achieve the rooting out of communism.

The notion of strengthening German influence in Lithuania and

the Baltic provinces, particularly Courland, was appealing to most shades of political opinion in the Reich – that is to say, where it was not overtly welcomed by conservative forces. Outright opposition was unlikely for some time to the 'forward policy' of the OHL which had justified the invasion of the Baltic in the first place. From the moment of occupation, however, Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg coupled his acceptance of the German takeover in Courland ('the nation's war aim') with an anxiety about hopelessly subverting the Bismarckian tradition of good German–Russian relations over Baltic issues. He was also troubled by the serious constitutional difficulties likely to confront the German Empire in the event of the Baltic provinces' being attached to it. For such reasons the Chancellor favoured the idea of indirect control over a 'buffer' zone, to be realized through advice, aid and influence from Germany, thus avoiding the political problems of annexation.[14] In the Auswärtiges Amt, worry about the military administration causing long-term damage to German–Russian relations was never absent. An appreciation of the strategic advantages of detaching the Baltic provinces from the Tsarist Empire was tempered by a desire to preserve the option of using them as a bargaining counter in any future peace talks with the Russian government. It was therefore logical of the German Foreign Minister, Richard von Kühlmann, to try to insist on a distinction between Courland, the possession of which at least did not cut Russia off from the sea, and Livonia and Estonia. In the event von Kühlmann's resistance to OHL efforts to convert Germany's policing role into full control in Livonia and Estonia helped to force his resignation in the summer of 1918. Yet von Kühlmann's successor, Admiral von Hintze, shared his concern to prevent the OHL from using the Baltic provinces to launch an attack on Lenin's government. Von Hintze was convinced that relations of a sort had to be preserved with Lenin, precisely because the weakness of the Bolshevik regime guaranteed peace in the East, whereas all the other Russian parties based themselves on the Entente and shared a desire to recreate a second front. Bolshevism, by fomenting unrest in Russia, assured German influence the more readily at its outer limits.[15] It is therefore misleading indeed to reduce civil–military conflicts over *Ostpolitik* in 1918 to a debate simply about means, just because of a mutual acceptance of the desirability of maintaining a strong German influence in the Baltic region.

In reality, at the very height of its military power in the East,

Germany's victory created more problems than could be solved. The Treaty of Brest–Litovsk made acute the question of the future status of the Baltic provinces by levering them out of the Bolshevik realm and stipulating that their fate was to be determined 'in agreement with their populations'. Here was the barely concealed response to the political challenge thrown out by the Russian revolution, initially through the provisional government's promise of autonomy to the provinces in March 1917 and later, after the Bolshevik seizure of power, through the Leninist slogans of self-determination. The challenge of self-determination was taken up by the majority parties in the German Reichstag at a time when a national mood of disillusionment and mounting weariness was straining the civil truce achieved in Germany at the outset of the War. After the Reichstag Peace Resolution had called for a peace without annexations in July 1917, there remained a steady insistence on the part of the majority parties that the native Baltic peoples be given their due share in determining their new status, in strict accordance with Brest–Litovsk. How effective such pressures could be is confirmed by the fact that in order to preserve their goal of attaching the Baltic countries to the Reich, even the German military leaders were increasingly compelled to resort to variants of 'self-determination'.[16]

In Lithuania the desire to counter a revival of the old Polish–Lithuanian union persuaded the OHL to deal directly with the native Lithuanians and to recognize the Lithuanian state by 25 March 1918, although it was still under German occupation. In the Baltic provinces, however, the OHL propounded the fiction that the 'interests of the people' could be equated with those of the Baltic German aristocracy. In this fiction the majority of the Baltic Germans wholeheartedly conspired by forming 'representative' provincial councils between September 1917 and March 1918. Dominated by the Baltic Germans, the councils therefore also contained a sprinkling of Latvian and Estonian conservatives. A process beginning in occupied Courland in September 1917 (when its council thanked the Kaiser for liberating their province and duly placed it in his hands) overlapped with events leading to the Brest–Litovsk settlement and climaxed shortly thereafter with the 'election' of a General Provincial Assembly. Composed of 35 Germans, 13 Estonians and 11 Latvians, on 12 April 1918 it duly passed a resolution calling upon the German Emperor to recognize the Baltic provinces as a monarchy and to make them into a German protectorate.[17]

Although the Reich's political leadership remained hesitant, it was compromised by its appreciation of the usefulness of German influence in a ring of border states on its eastern frontiers, as well as by an aversion to Bolshevism, which all parties shared. Yet the Reichstag majority parties, the Auswärtiges Amt and Chancellor Hertling were also to a considerable extent prisoners of the imperial German political structure, which had given the military their power in the first place. The exigencies of war and military occupation had vastly increased that power in the East under the 'silent dictatorship' of Hindenburg and Ludendorff. Quite apart from the fact that the German element in the Baltic provinces monopolized economic power there, the idea of basing policy in the region on the Baltic Germans was wholly consistent with the defence of conservatism in the Reich. The latter goal was central to the concerns of the military establishment behind the war effort. 'Landed nobility and a property owning middle class were the natural supports of a monarchic–conservative form of state.'[18]

The choice of the Baltic Germans on which to base a new political order in the Baltic fatefully determined the structure of the projected giant 'Baltic state' conjured up by the call from the General Provincial Assembly on 12 April. As to Lithuania, the idea of a personal union between that state and Saxony was mooted, whilst the Baltic provinces were marked out for a personal union with the Prussian Crown. In each case, however, the plan was checked at the Bundesrat level; by the rivalry between Württemberg and Saxony over Lithuania and between Prussia and Mecklenburg over the Baltic provinces. More significantly, proposals for extending and reinforcing the archaic voting system in existence in Prussia, through an association with the traditional constitutional order favoured by the Baltic Germans, ran directly counter to the mounting struggle in the Reichstag for socio-political reform. Ultimately it therefore proved impossible to reach any consensus in Germany on the constitutional problems posed by the settlement of Brest–Litovsk. The constitutional dilemma proved indeed to be the 'fatal wound' of German *Ostpolitik*. This was shown beyond all doubt in the summer of 1918, during the frantic activity involved in drawing up drafts of military, transport, customs and currency agreements to try to bind the Baltic provinces to the Reich without too openly violating the doctrine of self-determination. 'There ensued a wasteful confusion of disputed responsibilities and differences of opinion: between Prussia and the

other federal states, between the military and the politicians, between the Administration Oberost and the military government in Courland. The personnel in the leading offices changed so often that the preparatory work was continually delayed.'[19]

It would have been surprising on the other hand, if the German government had wholeheartedly endorsed the demands of Latvian and Estonian nationalists before 1918, not least because prior to the Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917 no clear call had been made by the native Baltic peoples for anything more than autonomy inside Russia.[20] Lenin's coup changed all this. The elected National Council of Estonia, which first met on 14 July 1917 under the presidency of Konstantin Päts, in accordance with the autonomy granted by the provisional government of Russia, had a majority of seats held by the bourgeois/labour group. Only 40% went to the Social Democrats and Social Revolutionaries. The composition of the National Council provides the key to the subsequent failure of the Bolsheviks to gain control of the Constituent Assembly elections after the formal declaration of Estonian independence on 28 November 1917. The ensuing civil war was ended by the arrival of the German armed forces, but in the day left between this event and the departure of the Soviet troops Estonia reaffirmed its independence on 24 February 1918. Latvia's situation was complicated by the much earlier occupation of Courland by German soldiers and by the ensuing departure of literally half of its inhabitants to Russia. It was not until 16 November 1917 that representatives of the different Latvian parties (except for the Bolsheviks) met in the unoccupied territory and proclaimed a Latvian National Council. A second democratic bloc was formed in secret in occupied Riga by Kārlis Ulmanis and others, also without the Bolsheviks or indeed the pro-German elements. The National Council was unable to proceed to the declaration of an independent Latvian republic until 15 January 1918.

The Baltic nationalist movements were therefore checked by the renewed German advance precisely when they were reaching a peak. Yet for the German military administration the maxim formulated by Hindenburg in 1916 still held good: 'The interests of the Army and of the Fatherland are our first priority. In so far as the interests of the native inhabitants do not conflict with these they will also be taken into account where possible.'[21] Such a response was certain to promote a backlash against all things German, notwithstanding the Reich's major contribution to keeping Bolshevism out of the Baltic

territories. The determined effort of the Latvians and Estonians to achieve independence by appeals to the outside world were already making an impact, not only in the Reichstag through the majority parties, but also in the cosmetic attempts which the Baltic Germans themselves were compelled to make to involve selected Latvian and Estonian elements in their appeals to the German Empire.

The process of policy reorientation in Germany was therefore first visible in a dawning recognition of the force of Latvian and Estonian nationalism. This recognition above all underlay the growing apprehension of the Reich's political leaders during the closing months of the war: that any policy continuing to frustrate national sentiment in the Baltic would lead to a total loss of German influence. Latvian and Estonian political leaders necessarily looked elsewhere for support for their goal of becoming independent of both Germany and Russia and redoubled their own efforts to involve the Allied Powers in their fate. In the words of the Estonian leader, Kaarel Pusta, the Baltic peoples wanted to bring their cause 'before the arbitration of Europe and America'.[22] As von Hintze commented in the late summer of 1918, 'From liberators, we have become detested conquerors.'[23]

Baltic diplomacy could hardly fail to be directed also against Lenin's White Russian opponents, who still hoped to form the future government of Russia once the temporary inconvenience of Bolshevism had been dealt with. Yet as Allied intervention and civil war in Russia lurched into being the Entente leaders betrayed their uncertainty by simultaneously offering general encouragement to the anti-Bolshevik cause and giving *de facto* recognition on 20 March 1918 to Estonia, a likely constituent of any restored Russia. Clearly, then, the chief motive for encouraging Estonia at that stage was to stiffen resistance to the Reich. Allied anxiety about negotiations between Germany and the Bolsheviks stemmed from an interest in trying to revive a front in the East. At the time of Brest–Litovsk Lloyd George thus reminded his Cabinet: 'Under one name or another, and the name hardly matters, these Russian provinces will henceforth in reality be part of the dominion of Prussia. They will be ruled by the Prussian sword in the interests of the Prussian aristocracy.'[24] E. H. Carr was not quite correct, however, when he minuted that Britain had nothing but sympathy to offer the Baltic states, for the persistent efforts of the Baltic nationalist leaders in the Allied camp throughout 1918 helped at least to ensure that Germany would indeed soon be engaged in a struggle for influence in the region. In January 1918 the

British Chargé dAffaires in Russia had already advised that if the Baltic provinces did not ultimately remain with Russia, they should become independent and form part of a bloc with Scandinavia, Finland and possibly Poland.[25] The outlines of what Lord Bertie of Thane was later to call 'an old fashioned quarantine guaranteeing against infection', were beginning to appear. The irony was not lost in German government circles that the policy of Brest–Litovsk could soon be neatly turned against the German Empire. In the wake of President Wilson's Fourteen Points of January 1918, even moral pressure from the Allied Powers reinforced the arguments within the Reichstag in favour of a timely reappraisal of the whole basis of Germany's border-states policy in the second part of 1918. There is, therefore, considerable force in the argument, advanced in 1927, that the treaty of Brest–Litovsk itself ensured the independence of the Baltic countries; in separating them from Russia it provoked Germany's opponents to do their utmost to prevent her from retaining the territories.[26]

The Allied goal moved suddenly nearer with the dramatic German military collapse following the failure of the Reich's spring offensive in the West. Since military power had kept the provinces in check, the chain of events leading to the German request for an armistice in October 1918 had immediate repercussions in the Baltic. The Reich's first genuinely responsible parliamentary government, under Prince Max of Baden, promptly attempted to end the somewhat dilatory treatment of Baltic issues in the wake of Brest–Litovsk and at last provided the opportunity for the reappraisal of *Ostpolitik* long demanded by the majority parties in the Reichstag. On 5 October 1918, the Baden government's programme proposed to have the military administration in the Baltic replaced by a civilian authority; negotiations would take place for the inclusion of native Baltic peoples in the administration and in the subsequent representative assemblies, in accordance with the will of the majority. Significantly, the reconsideration in October 1918 of Germany's policy in the Baltic provinces involved consultations with a leading member of the Baltic German community, Paul Schiemann. He had been kept out of the area by the German High Command but was to play a key role in Weimar–Baltic relations in the inter-war period (see below, chapter 2). The 'new policy' was signalled by a telegram from the German Foreign Office to its representative with the military administration in the Baltic: 'The government of the Reich is unanimous in respect of the

fundamental change in our policy towards the Baltic countries, namely that in the first instance policy is to be made with the Baltic peoples. In this way it might be possible to achieve the formation of governments which survive the Peace Conference.'

Far from expressing a loss of interest in the provinces, then, the prime aim of the new policy-line remained that of securing long-term political and economic influence, as was most evident in the emphasis placed on the survival of the Baltic Germans. The German government insisted that it would be unable to work with any regime in Latvia or Estonia which did not commit itself to the protection of the economic and cultural well-being of the German element.[27] Nevertheless, influence was to be preserved by bonds of friendship between Germany and the Baltic peoples, rather than by chains of subjection. Of course, the new policy received a decisive impulse from Allied pressures and from the need to look ahead to the terms of the peace. Such considerations were expressed in the readiness of the Auswärtiges Amt to abandon its previous insistence on maintaining relations with the Bolsheviks in Russia. In a memorandum dated 5 November 1918, the very day on which the Soviet representative Joffe was expelled from Germany for revolutionary activities, the Russian expert in the Auswärtiges Amt, Rudolf Nadolny, wrote:

> Concerning our policy in the East, it should be said that, in the context of the programme of the majority parties and of Wilson's points, and in anticipation of the Entente demands, it seeks as before to decentralise Russia politically with the aid of the nationality principle. And beyond this to create for ourselves possible political sympathy and opportunities for economic activity in the whole Eastern area. In pursuit of the policy it is planned to leave our troops in the occupied border states, with the exception of the Caucasus and eventually Poland, in order to support the setting up in the region of native forces.[28]

Such reactions, it has recently been suggested, were part of a wider search for a Reich foreign policy more able to strike an acceptable balance between German interests and those of the other powers: a product of reformist pressures in the Auswärtiges Amt, in business circles looking ahead anxiously for trade to be renewed, and of course amongst the majority parties.[29] Arguably this is to put too favourable a gloss on Germany's motives as its leaders faced defeat, but it is still more unsatisfactory to view the critical months after the Armistice merely as a sort of annexationist postscript to Germany's Baltic

policy. The German socialists who were swept into office as a result of the upheaval had nourished a profound distrust and dislike of the Baltic Germans on whose backs the military administration in the Baltic had been erected. This was true of both the Majority Social Democrats and the Independent Social Democrats. Although the right wing of the former had not expressly rejected annexationist gains in the East before 1918, the stand of the Reichstag faction thereafter was firmly based on the principle of self-determination for the border states. In accordance with its own reformist drive within the Reich, the leadership of the Sozialistische Partei Deutschlands (SPD) had demanded at the first reading of the bill for the Brest–Litovsk treaty that 'from now on in the border states there will be a policy of sincere understanding for democratic sentiments'. The SPD leader, Friedrich Ebert, reaffirmed at the end of August 1918: 'Our position on policy towards the border states is clear. We view the [Berlin] agreement as the continuation of a mistaken policy.'[30] SPD ideas above all had informed the programme of the Baden government. The shift in political power which brought Ebert in as a member of the all-socialist government on 9 November 1918 thus at least guaranteed that the embryonic 'new' policy of October found its due organizational expression. On 14 November 1918, August Winnig was appointed as Plenipotentiary of the German Reich for the Baltic countries. Like Zimmerle, his counterpart in Lithuania, Winnig represented the interim stage between the German military administration and the appearance of governments formed by the Baltic peoples.[31]

Nonetheless, the persistent element of uncertainty and improvisation inside the German policy-making establishment after Brest–Litovsk inevitably continued into the revolution; regrettably, the clarity of vision in taking into account the political realities in the border states was difficult for Ebert to sustain as the German socialists grappled with the tasks of reconstruction at home and preparations for the forthcoming peace talks. Admittedly, another of the preconditions of the policy change was met; namely, the need to help the emergent Baltic states to build up their own defences. Matthias Erzberger, the centre party politician and head of the German delegation to the Armistice talks, succeeded in influencing the wording of Article 12 of the ceasefire. German troops were to remain in the East to help 'in the restoration of peace and good government in the Baltic provinces and Lithuania' and to return to Germany only when the

Allied and Associated Powers thought the moment suitable. This could have been usefully applied to the policy orientation towards the Baltic countries which was slowly taking place in Berlin. In reality, confusion was compounded by the Armistice. It sealed the existing breach in German–Soviet relations by annulling the treaty of Brest–Litovsk and the supplementary agreements of Berlin, and in so doing forged a link between German and Allied policy towards the Baltic. Allied aims, were, however, 'dictated by the requirements of their Russian policy, which called for intervention in the civil war'.[32]

The opening of the Peace Conference in January 1919 made it if anything even more difficult for the Allies to agree on what their policy towards Russia was. The French were anxious in particular to restrict Germany in the East and thus had a strong commitment to pushing back Soviet influence from the border states. On the other hand, President Wilson and Lloyd George both coupled scepticism about a military solution to the Russian problem with a growing interest in the stabilization of trade between East and West. At the same time, Lloyd George had to take account of the pressures on his Conservative–Liberal coalition and of the demands from his back-benchers and from his War Minister, Winston Churchill, who continued to urge the armed overthrow of Bolshevism.[33] The Allies were reluctant to accord the Baltic countries more than *de facto* recognition pending the resolution of the Russian question as a whole. Yet they found it difficult to square even this grudging concession to Baltic self-determination with their support of the White Russian opposition to Lenin, as the abortive conference on the Russian question at Principo in January 1919 showed. In such a setting the containment of Bolshevism was the lowest common denominator of Allied policy, which at best, it was argued long ago, 'never progressed beyond improvisation'.[34]

The situation was not therefore conducive to the consistent development of Germany's October policy-line. The overriding concern of Ebert and the Majority Social Democrats, of the German Military and of the Auswärtiges Amt, particularly once Count Brockdorff-Rantzau became Foreign Minister from January 1919, was to give proof to the Allies of their shared resistance to Bolshevism, chiefly in the interests of securing more favourable peace terms for Germany.[35] Domestic considerations within the new German Republic reinforced this tactic, in that it was used to justify the determined restoration of internal order and the elimination of even the suggestion of Bolshev-

ism at home. Such was the foundation of the working relationship between the SPD on the one hand and, on the other, the Army High Command (OHL), the traditional civil service and the Auswärtiges Amt. The celebrated agreement between Ebert and General Groener on 10 November 1918, duly guaranteed the orderly return to Germany of the troops left outside the frontiers, in return for the army's help in putting down 'extremism' at home.

Objective realities made the likelihood of a Bolshevik-style revolution in Germany remote, as was confirmed by the decision of the Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies in Berlin on 16 December 1918 to accept Ebert's call for elections to be held for a National Assembly. This vote against revolution was hardly calculated to heal the rifts within German socialism. Once the USPD members had left the provisional government on 27 December 1918, it was a matter of time before force was used against the revolutionary shop stewards and against the Communist movement formed from the Spartacist ranks at the end of that month. Order was conveniently 'restored' in Germany as the Peace Conference convened in Paris early in January 1919, with the deaths of the German Communist leaders, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht at the hands of the newly formed Freikorps.[36] The appearance of these, the basis of the new Reichswehr, confirmed the success of General Groener's strategy, 'through our actions to capture a share of power in the new state for the Army and the Officer Corps'.[37]

BALTIC CAMPAIGN – 1919

The uneasy combination of traditional elites with new political realities at home in Germany was thus necessarily carried forward to the military campaign in the Baltic. In its earliest stages, according to the SPD Defence Minister, Gustav Noske, the venture was, 'summarily handled ... in the face of pressing cares and worries about internal order'.[38] As a result, considerable freedom of movement was created for the military leaders and for August Winnig. The latter found somewhat to his surprise that he could virtually 'make policy' at first, when he was informed by the Republic's first Foreign Minister, Wilhelm Solf, that he would have to deal with problems arising in the Baltic largely on his own initiative; the government was preoccupied with more pressing tasks. A comparable situation existed in London, where it was difficult 'to get the great and the good to attend to

problems that to a large extent were of only academic importance to us'.[39] By the time this mistake had been recognized Winnig had also become Oberpräsident of Prussia and had increased his personal power-base. As well as being authorized to act directly in the name of the German government, Winnig was closely involved with the military leaders and civilian authorities in West and East Prussia, particularly over questions of border defence.

When Winnig began to negotiate the required handover of authority to the provisional Baltic governments, military imperatives were paramount, as the Red Army pushed forwards through the gaps left by the exhausted and war-weary German occupying forces. The latter ignored the Armistice provisions and drifted back to the Reich at a pace which presented Winnig with a *fait accompli* in Estonia. On 19 November 1918, he was compelled to approve the existing transfer of power from the German military administration to the government headed by Konstantin Päts in Tallinn. There was more scope to exploit Latvia's desperate need for military aid in order to create better prospects for the Baltic German community. The latter anxiously awaited the setting-up of an administration by the Latvian leader, Kārlis Ulmanis (see below, chapter 2). Sympathy for Bolshevism was stronger in Latvia than it was in Estonia, partly owing to the native reaction against the prolonged German wartime occupation of Courland, which had caused many Latvians to leave for the Russian interior. There was therefore a greater threat of civil war in Latvia, and Winnig had greater leverage over the Ulmanis administration. The Germans formally handed over authority to Ulmanis on 7 December 1918, but Winnig's treaty with the Latvian government on 29 December clearly revealed his long-term hopes for prolonging direct Baltic–German and German political and economic influence in the East.[40]

The treaty offered citizenship of Latvia to any German volunteer fighting for at least two weeks to help clear Latvian soil of Bolshevism. Undoubtedly, the interpretation, both by Winnig and by the Baltic recruitment office set up in Berlin, of this provision to mean the promise of land was essential to attract German fighters to the East. Without such a flow of recruits the terms of the Armistice would have been impossible to meet. Fresh reserves were urgently needed to supplement the volunteer remnants of the retreating German 8th Army, who reconstituted themselves as the 'Iron Division'. Also backing was required for the Landeswehr, formed on 11 November